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ABSTRACT

This document presents the action plan of the Child Care Action Campaign (CCAC) for improving the quantity and quality of child care services. The document also provides a policy statement on linking education and child care efforts. The action plan describes CCAC's vision of a streamlined system providing child care to infants and toddlers, preschool children, and school-aged children, and calls on the business community to provide funding and organizational assistance. It is recommended that individuals interested in child care must: (1) make quality care affordable; (2) ensure that centers are safe and healthful, and provide family-centered experiences; (3) help families make informed choices about care programs; (4) extend the school day to reflect changing family realities; (5) designate or create community agencies to coordinate child care; (6) ensure collaboration between schools and care providers; (7) encourage the development of a system of training; (8) develop leave and flexible work policies for parents; and (9) encourage investment in child care and school-based facilities. The policy statement describes the role of child care in achieving the nation's school readiness goal, fostering child development, helping parents balance work and family responsibilities, and encouraging welfare reform. The policy statement also discusses key elements of an effective child care system, including universal access, quality, variety. community and parent involvement, continuous service from birth to school years, and training for providers. Information on CCAC's history and current projects is appended. (BCY)

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# Child Care and Education: The Critical Connection

## *Action Plan*

To ensure that every child gets a solid early childhood foundation, we must dramatically improve the quality and quantity of services available and develop ways for child care programs and schools to work together to give children and families access to them. This will require a significant investment from both the public and private sectors and a change in current public attitudes toward child care services. We can no longer afford to make what is an artificial distinction between education and child care. Instead, we must recognize that the functions of child care and education are indivisible. We define child care to include services delivered by families, schools, child care centers, Head Start, or any combination of these programs.

We must develop and adopt policies that enable parents to spend adequate time with their children and programs that promote children's healthy development. A combination of leadership, vision, legislative action and regulatory change are necessary to create such a system, using the best practices and programs being developed in states and communities across the country, and involving parents and the private sector, along with federal, state and local governments.

We are proposing a system that builds on what services currently exist, but links them together through community resource agencies that enable parents to make appropriate choices and that plan and develop new services where necessary. Programs are most effective when they are family centered, when parents have a strong decision-making role, when staff is well trained and well compensated, when they offer children a variety of developmentally appropriate activities, and when health, nutrition and other social services are available to families that need them.

The core of this child care system is a unified, streamlined system of services accessible to all families. Although we recognize that parents want a choice of services, clear parental preferences are emerging, depending on children's ages. In line with these preferences, a comprehensive system would emphasize the following:

1. for infants and toddlers, a system of child care services in a variety of settings, including family day care and child care centers, with trained and credentialed staff who have experience and special training in early childhood development and health;

2. for three-, four- and five-year-olds, a universal system of centers, incorporating the best elements of Head Start and other model child care programs, including parent involvement and access to comprehensive health screening. These programs must be available on a full-day, year-round basis either in neighborhood centers or in school buildings;

3. school-based programs for school-age children that may include extending and restructuring the school day.

We also call on the business community, with its great interest in quality child care—both to support its current work force and to nurture the next generation—to help build the system with funding, organizational assistance and other resources. Further, we challenge corporations to increase their efforts to create a family-friendly workplace by allowing employees the flexibility and time to be effective parents, to become partners in the child care system and to meet other family obligations, without compromising their contributions at work.

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To ensure that every child has a solid early childhood foundation, we must:

1. **Make quality child care affordable to all families.** All programs should be available to families on a sliding-fee basis. At present, parents pay an average of $3,000 a year for care; quality care, with adequate salaries for providers, costs $8,000 a year. To bridge the gap between what parents can afford and what quality child care costs, the Dependent Care Tax Credit should be expanded significantly and made refundable. This would put money into the hands of consumers, including low-income families that do not now benefit from the tax credit. In addition, all existing programs for low-income families, including Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Title IV-A, should be continued and expanded. Every state should be encouraged to provide a significant child care tax credit. We are proposing a system similar to the way higher education is funded and governed—a mixed system of public and private institutions, with support from user fees, federal and state funding and corporate and philanthropic contributions.

2. **Ensure that all children are cared for in settings that are safe and healthful and that provide family-centered, age-appropriate learning experiences.** The debate over federal standards has proved extraordinarily divisive in the past. We believe it is time to take a new approach that incorporates incentives and guidance rather than prescription. The federal government should develop recommendations for state standards and provide technical assistance that will enable the states to improve standards and regulation. The federal government should require each state licensing office to review standards periodically and should provide incentives, in the form of increased federal funds, for states that improve their standards and regulatory processes.

3. **Ensure that all families who use child care are able to make an informed choice about the program that best suits their needs.** If parents decide to use child care, they should be able to select from among a variety of programs including family child care, in-home care, child care centers, Head Start and school-based pre-school programs. Parents must have access to the information they need to choose the care that best suits their family's needs and to receive the support they need to pay for that choice.

4. **Extend the school day.** We ask the schools to respond to changing family circumstances and acknowledge that millions of school-age children of working parents are on their own before and after the school day. As a result, they are potentially at risk physically and emotionally. We challenge the schools to work together with the many interested constituencies and agencies in their communities to seize this new learning and caring opportunity.

As a first step, every school district should assess the need for latchkey care and develop a plan, either for each school or for the whole district, to meet that need. School personnel should work with parent groups and a coalition of interested agencies, such as community centers, libraries and recreation facilities. The resulting program may have academic components, with tutoring, homework help, quiet study time and special interest classes, and recreational activities, with sports, games and clubs. In all cases, the extended-day program must stimulate children and involve them in constructive and developmentally appropriate activities.

5. **Designate or create a community agency to coordinate child care programs.** At the community level, such an agency should coordinate all programs, whether they are funded by Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Title XX, the Family Support Act, Title IV-A, state pre-kindergarten funds, Chapter 1 or special-needs funding.

The agency's responsibilities would include:

- consumer education to enable parents to choose the best care for their child;
- training for providers and program staff;
- development of mechanisms to assure that funds follow children from program to program;
- data collection;
- ongoing assessment of needs and resources;
- planning and system evaluation; and
- stimulation of collaborative planning among the funding agencies, businesses, private philanthropies and government.

The agency should have a local governing board that represents all interested parties, including parents, business, unions, child care providers, Head Start, schools, special-needs agencies and other community agencies that deal with health, social services and recreation. Structured this way,

the agency would encourage broad participation in policy development; demand cost-effective planning among funding and linking agencies; and make the system accessible and "user-friendly" to families, providers, employers, funders and the community.

The agency could be a reconstituted resource and referral agency, community coordinated child care agency, family resource center, or a new agency set up to perform these functions.

6. **Ensure that child care programs and schools collaborate.** We urge the creation of a state division at the cabinet level that would be responsible for coordinating child care and early childhood education policy, dispensing funds and planning for and regulating all programs serving young children.

7. **Encourage the development of a system of training.** Our goal is well-compensated quality personnel in all settings. Child care staff must have access to training and career advancement comparable to that of teachers in public schools. Cross-disciplinary training should emphasize child development and early education practices.

8. **Develop leave and flexible work policies that enable parents to spend adequate time with their children.** All employers, both in the public and private sectors, must establish policies that give parents the opportunity to care for newborn or newly adopted children and to balance family and work responsibilities.

9. **Encourage increased investment in child care and school-based facilities** through public-private partnerships and through other community development strategies such as community development banks and community investment funds.

# Child Care and Education: The Critical Connection

## *Policy Statement*

Child care and education continue to be viewed as two separate processes, rather than as part of a whole environment that children need, from birth, to grow and develop. Until we establish the link between child care and education—both in policy and in program dimensions—we will continue to shortchange our children and their families.

Ten million American children under age six need child care for all or part of their day. They need care that will help them grow and learn and be ready for school, not just care that will keep them safe, healthy and happy. Another 13 million school-age children need a safe and supportive place to be during the hours when school is not in session and their parents are at work. Yet this kind of care is unavailable to some, unaffordable to many, and of uncertain quality to all. Seventy percent of the child care in the United States is inadequate—caregivers do not have the experience or training they need to provide quality care and licensing standards for these programs fail to guarantee the stimulation and attention children need. Not surprisingly, it is the children of the working poor and the middle class who are most likely to be in inadequate child care.

Child care is fragmented, poorly financed and hard to find. Its quality has declined over the past decade. Individual providers are isolated and do not see themselves as part of a common effort committed to achieving a national goal. Parents are faced with a confusing and chaotic array of choices. Their choices are constrained by the high price of many options and the difficulty of collecting and evaluating information about them. Planning and development of new resources take place at different, and uncoordinated, levels of government, and there is no single source of data on supply and demand. There is neither a comprehensive system of governance for child care nor any reliable source of financing for it. Child care workers are the second lowest paid group of workers in the country, and the turnover rate among them is the single biggest reason why child care quality, especially for the children of the working poor, is dangerously low.

To ensure that every child gets a solid early childhood foundation, we must dramatically improve the quality and quantity of services available and develop strong connections to the public schools. This will require a significant investment from both the public and private sectors, and a change in current public attitudes toward child care.

Making sure that every child gets a solid early childhood foundation by improving child care—and ensuring that it is available to all children who need it—is an essential prerequisite to attaining four of our nation's most urgent domestic priorities.

1. **School Readiness.** The first of our National Education Goals is to assure that "by the year 2000 every child will enter school ready to learn." To achieve this goal, we must recognize that there is no distinction between child care and education; child care is the form that education takes for many of our youngest children. By failing to make this connection, we miss a great opportunity to give children the start they need during a crucial period of their development.

2. **Child Development.** Child care and education must meet children's emotional need for security and affection, their cognitive need for stimulating play and learning activities, their physical need for good nutrition and health care, and their social need for positive interaction with adults and other children. Child care and school programs must also support strong families by providing parent education and referring parents to the services they

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need to raise their children well.

3. **Workforce Competitiveness and Productivity.** If we are to generate new economic opportunities, we must expand and improve the services that parents depend on to enable them to balance their work and family responsibilities.

4. **Welfare Reform/Eliminating Child Poverty.** If we are to enable families to move from welfare to work, we must invest in both generations that are dependent on welfare by guaranteeing that children receive quality child care while their parents are in job training and when they enter the paid labor force.

To achieve these goals, we must focus on the *child* in child care. Throughout our nation's history, child care has been viewed as a social welfare service, as a means of caring for children when their parents could not. This limited way of thinking has prevented us from seeing the educational and developmental opportunities. It is time to change that.

The Child Care Action Campaign has convened some of the best thinkers in the child care, child development and education communities in a series of seven regional meetings during the past year. These discussions have helped us identify the key ingredients of a system that provides quality care and education to our children. That system must be built on the following principles:

1. Children must have universal access to an adequate supply of services, with their parents paying fees based on their incomes.

2. Quality must be a paramount concern.

3. Any system of care and education must allow parents to choose from among a variety of services that meet basic quality criteria.

4. The community, including parents and guardians of children, must be vitally involved in planning, developing and monitoring a system of education and care.

5. The system of education and care must provide a continuous, developmentally appropriate learning experience for children from birth through their school years. The system should be structured so that the functions of education and care are not separate, whether they are delivered by families, schools, child care programs or any combination of these. Families must have access to comprehensive services, including health screening, parent education and social services.

6. Teachers and caregivers must receive comparable training and compensation for comparable jobs, regardless of the setting or auspice.

7. The private sector—including corporations and philanthropies—must play a major role in planning for and developing new child care resources and in creating policies that enable parents to balance work and family.

8. More money must be invested in training, physical facilities and consumer education and protection so that quality services are affordable for families.

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# About the Child Care Action Campaign

**Why Does This Country Need Child Care?**

- 51% of all mothers return to work before their babies' first birthday...
- 2/3 of all jobs created by the year 2000 will need to be filled by women, most of whom will become mothers...
- Mothers and fathers report that their work performance is affected by concerns about the quality of child care and by the need to make emergency child care arrangements.

**What is CCAC?**

The Child Care Action Campaign (CCAC), a national, non-profit coalition of individuals and organizations, was formed in 1983 to respond to our nation's child care crisis. Believing that child care can no longer be viewed solely as a women's issue, CCAC has taken the lead in making quality child care both a bottom-line economic issue and a fundamental component of education reform.

CCAC's mission is to stimulate and support the development of policies and programs that will increase the availability of quality, affordable child care for the benefit of children, their families, and the economic well-being of the nation.

CCAC's original research and groundbreaking publications are key elements in a national public education campaign to change attitudes about how our country cares for and educates its children and to provide parents, policymakers and businesses with the resources they need to understand the problem and work for change.

CCAC's materials have helped hundreds of thousands of parents deal with the daunting task of recognizing and finding quality child care and advocating improvements in their communities. CCAC is at the forefront of helping small businesses establish child care assistance programs for employees, and has provided vital leadership in bringing together the public and private sectors to develop partnerships for financing quality care.

CCAC continues to affect public policy by providing cogent analysis, expert testimony and technical assistance to government leaders and policymakers on child care and family issues. CCAC's 500-member National Advisory Panel, comprised of the nation's top child care experts, advocates and practitioners is a potent force working to improve the lives of all of America's children.

**CCAC's Track Record**

CCAC was instrumental in bringing an insurer into the child care field when providers all over the country were threatened with closing because of a lack of affordable liability insurance. Today, CCAC offers ***Insuring Your Future: Liability Insurance and Child Care***, a report on the availability of child care liability insurance for employers and providers.

CCAC positioned child care as a pressing economic issue through its policy paper and conference in 1988 ***Child Care: The Bottom Line.***

CCAC has explored ways to finance child care in a series of reports including Employer Tax Credits for Child Care: Asset or Liability? and Building Links: Developer Initiatives for Financing Child Care.

CCAC's **National Advisory Panel** enables CCAC to be a clearinghouse for information on model child care programs and policies. Working with the Panel, CCAC has produced two guides for state and local activists: ***Making the Connections: Public-Private Partnerships in Child Care*** and ***Not Too Small to Care: Small Businesses and Child Care.***

CCAC works for the passage of legislation at the federal and state levels, including the Child Care and Development Block Grant, a landmark child care bill which was passed by Congress in 1990 and the Family and Medical Leave Act signed by the president in 1993.

**What Are Some of CCAC's Latest Projects?**

CCAC's **Family Support Watch** program monitors the implementation of the child care guarantee and transitional benefits of the Family Support Act, a bill enacted in 1988. CCAC develops materials and strategies to enable state and local organizations to reach out to potential recipients. CCAC has publicized its findings through press conferences and briefings.

CCAC's **Education Campaign** will strengthen the link between education and child care by original research, a national conference, and through publicizing these efforts to the media, educators, parents, and to the general public.

CCAC's **Parents' Agenda** empowers parents by helping them to look for quality child care and telling them what steps they can take if they can't find the care they need.

CCAC is the resource for parents, having helped over one million since its creation in 1983.

**For more information about CCAC,**
**its projects, or legislation, and how you can help,**
**call CCAC at (212) 239-0138**